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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ADDIS ABABA 000200

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SUBJECT: USAU: SPECIAL ADVISOR WOLPE MEETS WITH PRESIDENT  
NKURUNZIZA ON THE MARGINS OF THE AU SUMMIT

REF: BUJUMBURA 00035

Classified By: S/A HOWARD WOLPE FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D).

This message is from USAU Ambassador Michael A. Battle.

¶1. (C) Summary. In a meeting with U.S. Special Advisor Wolpe on the margins of the AU Summit, Burundian President Nkurunziza characterized the 16 soldiers recently arrested as mutineers, not coup plotters, who posed no threat to the presidency or to the cohesion of the army. He reiterated his desire to have outside election observers monitor Burundi's elections and agreed to respond to the report drafted by the East African Community's (EAC) electoral support mission to Burundi. He downplayed the reports of political intimidation and violence as isolated incidents and said that perpetrators of those incidents were being arrested. He stated that land disputes pose a much bigger problem for Burundi. End Summary.

¶2. (C) In a February 2 meeting with Burundian President Nkurunziza on the margins of the African Union (AU) Summit in Addis Ababa, Special Advisor for the Great Lakes Region Howard Wolpe congratulated Nkurunziza on Burundi's gains in democratization and stability, and thanked him for the sacrifice the National Defense Forces (FDN) are making in support of the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM). Wolpe also outlined several concerns in the run-up to Burundi's elections, including the dismissal of Head of United Nations Integrated Office in Burundi (BINUB) Youssef Mahmoud, the departure of the South African monitoring mission, political intimidation by CNDD-FDD party hard-liners, and the recent arrest of 16 people for suspected coup plotting.

¶3. (U) Nkurunziza stated that the war is finished in Burundi. He said Burundi is helping other countries like Somalia to demonstrate to the world that there is peace in Burundi. Burundi now has elected institutions and, unlike previous elections in Burundi which have been followed almost immediately by coups d'etat, Burundi has made it almost five years without a coup. He reaffirmed his desire to have outside observers for elections scheduled to begin in May 2010, and claimed that no other African head of state has requested that election observation begin months before the actual elections.

¶4. (C) Nkurunziza explained that the recent arrests for suspected coup plotting are not overly worrisome. He characterized the intent of the plotters as mutiny rather

than a coup d'etat, and said it reflected dissatisfaction with social conditions in the security services. Nkurunziza mentioned as an example that ten soldiers had recently been cashiered for undisciplined protests over pay and housing disparities between troops and officers. He said the second aspect of the mutiny might have been to disrupt the election process.

¶15. (C) On reports of intimidation by the CNDD-FDD of its political opponents and political confrontations between youth organizations, Nkurunziza was dismissive and claimed they were isolated incidents. Unlike before, there is not broad-based ethnic support for political violence. He agreed, however, that some CNDD-FDD hard-liners are anxious about the prospect of losing power and are stoking tensions. According to Nkurunziza, these incidents are not widespread and perpetrators are arrested and tried. Land disputes are a much bigger problem than political party violence, said Nkurunziza.

¶16. (C) Nkurunziza dodged a question on whether or not the GOB has budgeted for the upcoming elections, and called for outside partners to help fund them. He stated that the international community had helped Burundi come this far, and must provide funds for the upcoming elections in order to consolidate peace and democracy and ensure that Burundi remains the success story that it has become.

¶17. (C) Wolpe also raised the issue of the EAC's recent electoral support mission to Burundi and concomitant report that still has not been published. Nkurunziza appeared

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amenable to the suggestion that the GOB formally endorse the findings of the EAC so that the report could be finalized and used as a basis for international election monitoring. Wolpe also recommended that Nkurunziza request in writing that the EAC provide international election observers, and consider convening all political party leaders to appeal for non-violent, fair elections. Nkurunziza agreed to both. Nkurunziza also appeared receptive to Wolpe's suggestion that the EAC partner with Burundi to provide a facilitation mechanism should the need arise for intervention during the election period.

¶18. (U) Also in attendance at the meeting were U.S. Deputy Special Advisor Yellin and USAU Military Advisor Ellington.

¶19. (C) Comment: President Nkurunziza appeared very relaxed and confident, particularly in his assertion that the recent incident was not designed as an attempted coup and did not threaten the cohesion of the armed forces. It is important now to ensure that he sends an official letter to the EAC, accepting the report of its electoral support mission and requesting long-term observers. End comment.

¶10. (U) S/A Wolpe has cleared this cable.  
YATES